



Al-Risala 2000

September-October

Just Balance

It is the Merciful who has taught the Qur'an. He created man and taught him articulate speech. The sun and the moon pursue their ordered course. The plants and the trees bow down in adoration. He raised the heaven on high and set the balance of all things, that you might not transgress that balance. Give just weight and full measure (55:1-9).

Both the creation of man and the revelation of divine guidance are expressions of God's justice. By creating man, and in bestowing upon him the unique gift of speech – possessed by no other object in the universe – God has given him the opportunity to attain a high position on earth and in the heavens, so that he may find for himself an eternal state of happiness.

After the creation of man, the divine blessings culminated in the sending of the Prophet and the revelation of the divine Book. Man, in being provided with right guidance, has been given a supreme opportunity to set his feet on the straight path, and to continue upon it without deviating, so that he may reach his final destination in the knowledge that his life has been a testament to the greater Glory of the Almighty.

It is necessary for the Lord's servants to weigh their words and deeds in the divine scales of justice, for the entire world around man is established on this principle of justice by which he is required by his Creator to regulate his life. No man in the process of giving or receiving must ever fall into unjust ways. Each of his actions must conform to the standards of truth and justice. And his deeds must be in consonance with what he professes. While the Qur'an gives this verbal expression, the events of the universe are a practical demonstration of it. In this way, man can never be in doubt as to which principles to adopt in his life.

The Day of Defeat and Victory

It was He who created you. Yet some of you are unbelievers, while others have faith. He is cognizant of all your actions.

He created the heavens and the earth to manifest the Truth and He formed you and gave you good shapes. To Him you shall all return.

He knows what the heavens and the earth contain, and knows all that you hide and all that you reveal. He knows what is in your hearts.

Have you not heard of those who disbelieved before you? They tasted the fruit of their unbelief, and a grievous punishment is yet in store for them. That is because, when their apostles brought them clear signs, they said: 'Shall mortals be our guides?' They denied the truth and gave no heed. But God was in no need of them: He is Self-sufficient and Glorious.

The unbelievers think that they will not be raised from the dead. Say: 'By the Lord, you shall assuredly be raised to life! Then you shall be told of all that you have done. That is easy enough for God.'

Believe then in God and His Apostle and in the light which We have revealed. God has knowledge of all your actions.

The day on which He will assemble you, the day on which you shall all be gathered – that shall be a day of mutual loss and gain. Those who believe in God and do what is right shall be forgiven their sins and admitted to gardens watered by running streams, where they shall dwell forever. That is the supreme triumph. (64:2-9)

Those who achieve success in this world are happy, while those who suffer failure become small and insignificant in the eyes of others. But the truth is that although both defeat and victory in this world have their value, the actual place of defeat and victory is the Hereafter. The loser is one who loses in the Hereafter and the victor is one who is victorious there. The standard of both loss and gain there is totally different from what it is in the present world. Victory and gain in this world are based on patently material things, while victory and defeat in the Hereafter will be measured on a divine standard. At that time people will be astonished to see that here matters have been completely reversed. What people had considered gain was actually loss, and what people had considered loss by worldly standards was, in actual fact, gain by the standards of the Hereafter.

Introducing Islam

All Praise is Due to God

One of the important teachings of Islam is that on receiving anything, we should be grateful to God in acknowledgment of His bounty, and utter these words 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds.' Praise of God, in its true spirit, is the essence of the Qur'an. After having accepted Islam, a believer's inmost feelings find expression in these words of praise.

Man's existence is a blessing of God. Man's extremely balanced body is a blessing of God. The entire world created so favorably for man is a blessing of God.

When this reality dawns on man and he realizes God's immeasurable blessings upon him, his soul is filled with a feeling of gratefulness to God. His heart and mind are overawed by His greatness. At that moment words of acknowledgment of God – 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds' spontaneously come to his lips.

God Almighty is too great for man to give Him anything. The only thing man can offer in His presence is acknowledgment. The moment of man's greatest worship of God is when his soul is pervaded by God's glory and greatness; when he recognizes God's divinity as compared to man's servitude; when, in full awareness of his own helplessness, he comes to acknowledge God's bounties in the true sense of the word.

When man discovers God with all His attributes, his soul lies prostrate before Him. His whole being turns towards God. The feelings inspired in him by God's bounties surge within him like the waves of the ocean.

When all these feelings find verbal form, they are called praise and gratefulness to God.

God is the greatest being of the universe. Yet, in a universe visible to all, God's supreme glory remains invisible. Realization of God is to discover this hidden greatness. This realization finds expression in words such as 'Praise be to God – Lord of the Worlds.'

May God Reward You

One of the teachings of Islam is that on receiving some gift or benefit from another, one should pray that God may reward the giver handsomely. Acknowledging a gift with the words: "May God reward you," not only expresses a high form of regard for the giver, but also testifies to the fact that God alone has it in His power to give rewards. When the recipient of a favor says to God on behalf of his benefactor: "O

God, help him as he has helped me, and give him more than he has given me,” this demonstrates an even higher form of regard.

The phrase ‘May God reward you,’ is expressive of two virtues, one being gratitude and the other being the willingness to give as well as to take. Its utterance emphasizes the principle that one should be a giver as well as a taker. A man should always be at pains to benefit those who have benefited him. He should be so thankful to his benefactor that he starts praying for them. A genuinely heart-felt prayer is the best gift that a man can give to his fellow-men.

Insha Allah (God Willing)

One of the teachings of Islam is that when we undertake a task, we should start by saying, ‘Insha Allah,’ – God willing. According to the Qur’an, the owners of a certain orchard made it known that they intended to pluck its fruits as soon as they were ripe. But they added no reservation such as: ‘If it be God’s will.’ When they reached their orchard the next morning, they found that a God-sent calamity had destroyed their entire crop. This was the result of their having omitted to say ‘God willing’ (68:18).

God willing (Insha Allah) is a phrase of great significance. Islam teaches us that whenever a man is going to embark upon any venture, he should say, ‘if God wills’ before he begins. This is to acknowledge the reality that God alone is the Doer in this world. A person can achieve his ends successfully only when God’s blessings are with him. God alone has the power to make things happen, as everything functions according to His will. Man can only wish for certain happenings, but occurrence rests with God alone.

When man thinks seriously of God’s all-powerfulness and his own total helplessness, such feelings find expression in the words, ‘Insha Allah.’ In this way he acknowledges that he can only make a beginning. So far as the completion of the task is concerned, it lies entirely in God’s hands.

The phrase Insha Allah in its essence is a form of prayer. Beginning one’s work with Insha Allah is like seeking God’s company and when God, the Lord of the universe, accompanies us on our journey, who can stop us from reaching our destination?

Conveyance

To facilitate travel in this world, we have to use transport of one kind or another. Islam teaches us that when we make use of these different means of transport, we must remember God and say: ‘Glory to Him who has subjected these to us. But for Him we could never have accomplished this. To our Lord we shall return.’ (43:13-14)

One of God’s countless bounties to man is His provision of suitable conveyances. To meet different requirements man has to travel from one place to another. But he cannot traverse long distances on foot. God has therefore come to his aid and made certain things subject to him in order that he may utilize them as transport.

Initially, animals alone were the means of conveyance. Then man crossed the seas, making ships for traveling long distances. Investigations revealed that God had endowed matter with such properties that it could be fashioned into much more rapid forms of transport. Hence the motor car and the aeroplane came into existence.

All means of transportation, right from the horse to the aeroplanes, are blessings of God. If they were brought into being, it was entirely due to God having harnessed the potential of nature to human use. When man thinks of all these bounties showered upon him by God he spontaneously calls out: 'O God, It is You who has subjected everything to us. It would not otherwise have been possible for us to make use of things as we have.'

Blessings are of benefit to the thankful person in this world as well as in the next. All that a thankless person will receive is temporary provision in this world and eternal chastisement in the next.

Inna Lillah

It often happens in this world that man loses something, or suffers some calamity. On such occasions, Islam teaches us to willingly resign ourselves to our misfortune, taking that to be God's decree. On all such occasions the sufferer should utter the words: 'We belong to God and we shall return to Him.'

God has made this world for the purpose of putting mankind to the test. Here, receiving and losing are both designed as a trial for man. Therefore, when man receives something, he should prove himself to be a thankful servant of God. And when he loses something he should adopt the attitude of patience. Only one who can do so will pass God's test. In this world man cannot save himself from experiencing unpleasant things. Sometimes he will suffer from the pangs of hunger and thirst, at others, a life very dear to him will pass away or he will incur a loss of wealth. On all such occasions these words must come to his lips ... 'We belong to God and we shall all return to Him.'

Through these words man acknowledges his status of servitude vis a vis God's all-powerfulness. He expresses himself in words such as these: O God, You are the giver. If You have taken something out of what You have given me, You had the right to do so.

Saying Inna Lillah is a form of worship. This is to adopt the attitude of surrendering to God's will instead of complaining against fate. It is to convert the loss into a new discovery.

This phrase, 'We are from God and to God we shall return' is, in short, an acknowledgment of God's godhead on the part of His servants.

After Eating and Drinking

One of the teachings of Islam is to praise God, after satisfying one's hunger and thirst, in words such as these: All praise is due to God who provided me with food and water, and who made me one of the believers. Man cannot survive without food and water. He requires these things continuously throughout

his entire life. For man's requirements God has made perfect arrangements. On the one hand, He has provided water in abundance on the earth, on the other, He has provided ample nourishment which man can obtain with the minimum of effort.

When a believer is hungry and thirsty, and he eats and drinks, he is overwhelmed with the feeling of how great that God is who has made such splendid provision for him. If God had not done so, he would have suffered the pangs of hunger and thirst, having had to go without food and water. His whole body expresses his acknowledgment of God's bounties and he calls out: Praise be to God for all of His abundant provisions!

On receiving bodily sustenance the believer is reminded of the spiritual sustenance provided for him by God. Through revelation God gave man the knowledge of what He wants from him, thus enabling him to lead his life according to His will and ensuring his success in the next eternal world. Man then remembers God with even greater adoration. Every moment of his life, man ought to keep praising God, – God, who has made the most superb provision for him, both physical as well as spiritual.

Rising from Sleep (The life after death)

The Prophet of Islam likened death to sleep and life to the state of wakefulness after sleep. When he awakened in the morning, he would say: All praise and thanks are due to God who gave us life after death." For the rest of mankind, waking and sleeping are likewise symbolic of life and death. Going to sleep is like dying and waking up in the morning is like rising from the grave. Our inevitable awakening after sleeping foreshadows with certainty how we shall arise after death to give an account of our deeds on the Day of Judgement.

Man has to pass his life in this world in such a way that every happening becomes for him a reminder of the Day of Judgement. His sleeping and rising should also serve as reminders of life after death. The most delicate aspect of man's life is that his existence does not come to an end after death. He has to be reborn in another world. The present world is the world of action, while the world to come will be one in which he reaps his reward. That will be the beginning of a new and eternal life – either eternal heaven or eternal hell.

Man is reminded daily of this most important reality when he goes to sleep and when he rises from sleep. In this way, actions of this world come to remind man of the hereafter.

The Prophet of Islam used to lead a very simple life and laid great stress on believers doing likewise. Once he said, "O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me, 'Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith.' 'Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith.'

When man has discovered the greatness of God, his own existence, in comparison appears quite insignificant. This feeling makes him into a truly modest person. His whole being is colored in the hue of servitude. His manner ceases to be aggressive and his voice becomes gentle. Even his gait expresses his modesty. His whole attitude comes to reflect a new seriousness.

All this inevitably results in his preferring simplicity in everything, in food, drink, living arrangements, and so on. He avoids luxuries, pomp and show. His soul finds pleasure and contentment in leading a life of simplicity instead of indulgence.

True faith leads man away from artificial things to nature, where simplicity is the rule. He develops a liking for a simple way of life which is more natural. This naturalness behooves the believer. Naturalness is in accordance with his modesty and humility, themselves great virtues in the eyes of God.

Fasting and Self Purification

Fasting is an exercise in self-discipline. During the month of Ramadan, the believer abstains in the daytime from food and drink of his own free will. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way, he builds up his self-control. By practicing restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

Apart from man, there are in the universe innumerable other things, all of which – having no free will of their own – adhere strictly to God's law. Man, however, is not in the same category as these things, for God has given him the freedom to choose which path he will tread. Notwithstanding this divine gift of freedom of will, it is still the desire of the Almighty that man should, by his own choice, tread the path of obedience.

It is therefore to condition him to follow the path of restraint that the rule of fasting has been laid down. No mere annual ritual, fasting is a form of training undergone every ninth month of the Muslim year. It is not just a matter of temporarily enduring hunger and thirst; it is a lesson in the permanent practice of patience and tolerance throughout one's entire life.

While on a fast a man may have food and water before him, despite his hunger and thirst, he will make no move to eat or drink. He exercises self-control and then God desires that he should also exercise the same restraint whenever he has the opportunity to display his ego and his arrogance. He must not fall into unjust ways just because the bait is tempting and all doors have been opened for him. If man is to earn God's favor, he must eschew the path forbidden by Him, and set his feet firmly on the path of modesty and humility.

The path followed perforce by the universe has to be adopted by man of his own free will. That is why it is desirable that he should lead a life of self-imposed curbs. The unflinching self-restraint, which prevents him from eating or drinking while on a fast, is the virtue that will guarantee moral behavior throughout his life.

Moral Piety

In the Hadith, Ramadan is called "month of patience" (Mishkat al-Masabih, 1/613). This month is meant to serve as a training course, which will enable the individual to lead a successful life in this world by keeping his negative feelings under control. Negative feelings, it must be remembered present the greatest obstacle to human progress. Fasting is the pious way to solve this biggest of human problems.

As the Hadith says: "There is a Zakah for all things, and the Zakah of the body is fasting" (Mishkat Al-Masabih 1/ 639). Here, the expression Zakah is used in the sense of purification. There is, indeed, a way of purifying everything. Just as bathing purifies the body, so fasting purifies the soul.

According to Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad observed: “Whenever one of you is invited to a meal while he is on a fast, he should inform his host that he is fasting” (*Mishkat* 1/611). According to another tradition the Prophet gave this very sound advice; whenever one of you is on a fast, he should be soft in his demeanor. In the event of being abused or provoked, he should simply say that he is on a fast” (*Mishkat*, 1/611).

Leading a life of restraint for a whole month produces a transformation in one’s thinking. It enables one to offer a positive response even to other’s negative behavior. Even strong abuse and other types of provocation will not push the fasting-believer into retaliating in the same coin. Rather than sink to that level, he will simply explain that he is on a fast. His own heart tells him that by observing a fast he has pledged himself to piety and that he cannot contemplate any evil action.

In this way, fasting inculcates in man the necessity to abstain at all costs from anti-social activities, and from all ungentlemanly words and deeds. He is thus brought to a life of moral restraint in this world.

Forgiveness – An Islamic Virtue

Islam attaches great importance to the concept of pardoning of sins by God so that one may be saved from Hellfire. On several occasions, the Qur'an gives such prayers as 'Pardon us, forgive us our sins, and have mercy upon us' (Qur'an 2:286). God assures us that no matter what our sin, if we truly repent and seek His forgiveness, and take steps to put right our wrongs, He will forgive us. The Prophet Muhammad said, "My heart is clouded until I have asked God's forgiveness seventy times during the day and night."

We are likewise asked to show mercy to our fellow men. (90:17) Since God is Himself forgiving, He desires that people should cultivate this attribute and show forgiveness to other human beings. (The Qur'an, 24:22; 64:14).

The Prophet Muhammad taught his followers that the individual who pardons his enemy, even while having the power to extract revenge, will be nearest to God in the Hereafter. Once the Prophet was asked, "How many times are we to forgive our servants' faults?" He remained silent. The questioner repeated his question. But the Prophet gave no answer. But when the person asked a third time, he said, "Forgive your servant seventy times a day."

The Qur'an makes it clear that a strong, adverse, emotional reaction such as anger does not befit the true believer, and instead cites as a mark of excellence the quality of forgiveness: "When they become angry, they are forgiving." (The Qur'an, 42:37)

History Speaks

Roger II (1095-1154), founder of the Norman dynasty in Sicily, holds a distinguished place among medieval European monarchs. He had his capital at Palermo, and is noted for having made Sicily into a prosperous country. He established a strong administration, and constructed a powerful fleet. The success of Roger II, according to a western historian, can be attributed in part to the fact that he “made Sicily a meeting place of European and Arabic scholars.”

Al-Idrisi was a contemporary of Roger II. Born in Marrakesh, he was educated in Spanish universities. Later he traveled extensively in Europe, Asia and Africa. He became the greatest geographer of his age, and a close friend and adviser to Roger II, at whose court he served as official geographer. Roger II originally invited Al-Idrisi to Sicily to make a map of the world for him.

Here we can see the cause of the esteem in which Muslims were held in times past. They made Islam a dominant force on the world scene, not through protests and demands, nor from spreading conflict and terror, but through being useful to the world. By virtue of hard struggle, they established themselves as intellectual leaders of the world. They had something that others did not have, so people flocked to their sides. That was how Muslims raised their standing in the world in times past. It is by the same method that they can improve their position today, and build for a better future.

Dawah Responsibility

The position of the Prophet Muhammad was that of a *da'i*. On his behalf, the position of his Ummah too was, and still is that of a conveyor of God's word. The Qur'an enjoins: "Say: 'This is my path with sure knowledge. I call on you to have faith in Allah, I and all my followers.'" (12:108)

The Prophet Muhammad was not just a prophet; he was the Final Prophet. His responsibility extended, therefore, to the Final Day of Judgement. He had to communicate the message of monotheism to all the people coming into the world till Doomsday. But he could not go on living in this world forever. He had to leave the world at the end of the normal human life span. Now the question arose as to who should shoulder the responsibility of communicating the divine message. There was no doubt that this responsibility was to fall on the Muslim community. And with the Muslim community it still rests. In fact, the Muslim community has, on the Prophet's behalf, to discharge this responsibility till Doomsday.

According to a hadith, the Prophet said: "Why do I need to hold your waist and save you from fire? Listen, my Lord will call me and He will surely ask me whether or not I communicated His message to His servants. I will say, 'Yes, my Lord, I have communicated Your message.' Listen, those who are present must, communicate this message to those who are not present."

According to this tradition, it is as if the Prophet Muhammad, is enjoining each member of the Muslim community to continue the daw'ah mission after him till Doomsday. That is to say, they were to enable him to say to his Lord that he had discharged his *daw'ah* responsibility by communicating his message to all the people till Doomsday; directly during his lifetime and indirectly afterwards.

A Danger Warning

What is the reality of life? Normally people do not like to think of such things. For them, there is one life – that of the world – and they try to live it in as prestigious and comfortable a way as possible, for afterwards, neither man, nor anything that concerns him, will remain. Some do think about this matter, but only on a philosophical level. They seek a theoretical explanation of the world. Such explanations are interesting from a philosophical point of view, but they are of no basic value to man. Theoretical discussions about whether a cosmic spirit keeps the whole universe revolving for its own fulfillment, or whether everything is part of some sublime being, do not raise any personal issues for man. Some have a religious answer to the question, but their solution is also of no import to man. Some religions hold that the son of God was crucified in atonement for man's sins; others see life as a mysterious, recurring cycle, with man repeatedly being born and dying; some claim that man will be rewarded and punished in this world. These are the creeds of which most religions are made.

All such solutions to the problems of life differ from one another considerably but in so much as none of them raises any serious personal issue for man, they are all the same. They are either explanations of events or a means of providing us with some sort of spiritual satisfaction. They do not issue us with any warning or stir us into any action.

But the answer provided by the Prophet Muhammad is of an entirely different nature. Whereas the other answers do not raise any critical issue for man, the answer provided by the Prophet places every individual in a precarious position from which the next step leads either to an awesome abyss of destruction or to a world of eternal bliss. It requires every man to take a serious view of his situation – even more so than a traveler in the night whose torch reveals a black snake slithering menacingly in front of him.

The message taught by Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, contains a greater warning for all mankind. He taught that after this world a vaster world is awaiting us, where every person will be judged and then punished or rewarded according to his deeds. The props which man relies on in this world will not support him there, for there will be no trading, no friendship and no acceptable intercession.

The warning which the Prophet delivered to mankind makes his existence a matter of personal importance to everyone. Everyone's fate, according to his teachings, hangs in the balance. Either one can believe in his message and follow his guidance, thus preparing oneself for everlasting paradise, or one can ignore his teachings, thus resigning oneself to eternal hellfire.

There are two things which make this matter even more worthy of our attention. Firstly, the arguments of

those who have expounded other theories on this matter have been very dubious. Those who consider material aggrandisement to be all that is worthwhile in life have no proof for their theory; their ideas are based on superficial attractions. Those who speak in philosophical terms have only analogies to offer as evidence. They themselves do not have full faith in what they say, so how can others be expected to accept their theories?

Then there, are those who speak with reference to the prophets and scriptures. Basically their platform is solid, but the prophets and books to which they refer belong to an age-long past. We have no reliable historical information regarding them at our disposal. Even though the original source of these religions is sound, we still cannot rely on their teachings as they are at present. The criterion with which to judge the past is history, and history does not verify the authenticity of their dogmas.

With the Prophet Muhammad, however, the case is quite different. On the one hand, his prophetic credentials stand up to any scrutiny. He was the epitome of everything a prophet should be. There is no doubt about his prophethood; it is an established historical fact which no one can deny.

The facts of Prophet Muhammad's life and teachings have also been carefully preserved; their historical credibility cannot be contested. The Qur'an exists in its revealed form. The words and actions of Prophet Muhammad are recorded in book-form, so one has no difficulty in establishing exactly what he said and did in his life.

The Prophet warned us that we are confronted with a reality which we can never change; we have no choice but to face it. Death and suicide only transfer us to another world; they do not obliterate us altogether. The Creator has established an eternal scheme for success and failure which no one can alter or opt out of. We have to choose between heaven and hell; we have no other choice.

If the meteorological department forecasts a hurricane, it is telling us about an impending disaster in which those affected will have no say in the matter; another power will control events. One can either escape or expose oneself to destruction. So, when the earthquake of the Last day occurs there will be no path to safety save that which the Prophet of Islam has laid down. We ignore that path at our own peril.

Salah

(Inner Virtues of Muslim Ritual Prayers)

Ibn Khaldun has recorded an incident regarding Salat in his Muqaddama. It was during the days of the second caliph, 'Umar Faruq, that the army of Sahaba entered Persia. There were no mosques there at that time, so Muslims prayed in the open fields.

Rustam, the general of the Persian army often saw Muslims saying their prayers out in the open. He saw all the Muslims standing in straight lines in rows, their leader standing in front, and amazingly, all the Muslims assuming the same postures as their leader. All the Muslims stood together, kneeled together and sat together as indicated by their prayer leader. On seeing this, Rustam once remarked. *"Umar has eaten my liver (Umar has undone me completely). He is teaching the dogs the adab (discipline) of life. "*

Discipline is the outward form of *salah* (prayer). When a non-Muslim observes the devotees at prayer, he will arrive at the same conclusion – that they are taking lessons in discipline.

Discipline is the external aspect of *salah*. The internal aspect of *salah* is *khushu* and *taqwa*. Just observing the external aspect of *salah* gave Rustam a scare. Now you can understand, when the external aspect is combined with the internal aspect, how powerful *salah* could become! *Salah* is the greatest form of worship for Muslims. It is moreover, the greatest power of Muslims. If we could tap this power fully, we should receive all the blessings of this world as well as the next.

Creation Plan

Blessed be He in Whose hands is all sovereignty: He has power over all things.

He created life and death that He might put you to the test and find out which of you acquitted himself best. He is the Mighty, the Forgiving One.

He created seven heavens, one above another. Do you see any fault in the work of the Merciful? Turn up your eyes: can you detect any rift?

Then look once more and yet again: your eyes will in the end grow dim and weary.

We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, missiles for pelting devils. We have prepared a scourge of flames for these, and the scourge of Hell for unbelievers: an evil fate! (67:1-6).

When one studies the present world, one finds an apparent contradiction, that is, that the entire universe besides man is quite perfect and organised. At no point is there any defect to be seen. By contrast, human life is marred by oppression and injustice. This is due to the nature of man being different from that of the rest of the universe. Man in this world is in a state of trial. Trial requires, of necessity, freedom of action. It is this freedom which enables him to perpetrate oppression and tyranny in this world.

Tyranny in the human world is the price of human freedom. Yet, without freedom, how can those precious human souls who opt not to be unjust and oppressive – despite the opportunities that present themselves-be differentiated from the willing perpetrators of injustice and oppression? Without freedom, how can those who choose not to indulge in insolent behaviour although quite free to do so be held above those who do not hesitate to stoop to insolence?

Besides man, nothing in the universe is going to be sent to heaven or hell. If man's fate is different, it is because, having been given the exceptional capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, between truth and untruth, he is a *responsible* creature. This moral endowment is, in essence, the key to man's lot in the Hereafter. In the final judgement, those who have put their freedom to the right and proper use will be rewarded. Those who have not will be punished.

The Master Key

An article in an Arabic magazine headlined *Al-Miftahul Azim* (Master Key), citing *dawah* power as the greatest of all Islamic strengths, says that if in the past, Islam achieved its universal victories *through dawah*, today, it can turn its defeats into victories by the same method.

Dawah is very much under discussion these days among Muslim writers and speakers. Its exponents, however, spend more time unraveling the plots and conspiracies hatched against them by non-Muslim nations than in practicing what they preach. That is to say that, on the one hand, they exhort Muslims to assume the role of *da'i is* while, on the other hand, they assure them with great vehemence that as far as the Muslims are concerned, all the nations of the world have turned into rapacious wolves and, as such, must be fought against and annihilated.

Both these utterances are made in the same breath, without any awareness of their contradictory nature, the one spelling peace and the other spelling war. And who are these nations who, day in and day out, are labeled oppressors and conspirators? They are those very non-Muslim nations who are the potential recipients of *dawah*. They are our *mad' us*. The Muslims are the *da'is* and their neighboring nations are the *mad'us*. Now, when *da'is* are constantly having it bored into them that the *mad' u* is a cruel predator, there can be no arousal of any sincere missionary spirit as described in the Qur'an: the *da'is* is truly a well-wisher of his *mad'u*

Dawah is wholly an experience of love. The *da'is* must be fully committed to guiding his *mad'u*. Only then can the process of *dawah* be meaningful. The *da'is* must ignore the antagonism and combativeness of the *mad' u*; he must erase all adverse impressions of the *mad'u* from his heart, so that he may spontaneously begin praying for the *mad'u's* guidance.

People talk of *dawah* without ever realizing its prerequisites. They want the credit for being *da'is* without ever fulfilling its demands. They want the credit for communicating the divine message to man without paying the price for it.

This is true not only of the weak Muslim minority in non-Muslim countries, but also of the Muslim majority living in Muslim countries. The only difference between these two categories is that the former have endless grievances against the local non-Muslim authorities, while the latter blame their woes on international non-Muslim powers such as the Jews, Christians, Orientalists, and so on.

In Islam, the most important consideration of all is *dawah*. All other considerations, no matter how serious and important they may be, can be legitimately passed over in its favor. The Sunnah of the Prophet gives such clear guidelines on this subject as leaves no doubt in the mind of a lover of Truth.

Shortly before his migration to Madina, the Prophet visited Ta'if. There, scorned by the inhabitants, he was subjected to the worst kind of humiliations, details of which can be had from Sirah books. The Prophet later told his wife, Aishah, that he had never had a harder day than the one in Ta'if. It was when the Prophet left Ta'if in great grief and sorrow that he was visited by the angel of the mountains at God's command. He said to the Prophet, "God has heard what your people had said to you. *I am the angel of the mount. If you ask me I can crush their settlement by these mountains*". The Prophet replied, "No, I am still hopeful that there will arise people among their following generations who will worship God without associating anything with Him." (As-Sirah an-Nabawiyya li Ibn Kathir vol. II, p. 153).

It is quite plain that *dawah* is the master key. But it takes a great heart to make use of it. It takes a character of the utmost sublimity – khuluqin *azim*, as it is described in the Qur' an. Only those who possess such qualities can recognize and utilize such opportunities as come their way.

God has made *dawah* the master key for believers for all time. Whatever the Muslims gained in the first phase of Islamic history was through *dawah*. Any future gains will likewise be through *dawah*, for the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions in world history is still making its impact. It has facilitated the process of *dawah* and invested them with great power. It is still the super key to meaningful achievement in the world of religion.

In modern times, the latest methods of communication have provided new avenues for the propagation of Islam. But even more important is the development of various branches of scientific research which have quite finally established the veracity of Islam. What was formerly achieved by our predecessors in circumstances fraught with great difficulty because of poor, or non-existent communications, and a lack of scientific proofs, can now be accomplished with comparative ease.

Dawah is certainly the master key for believers. But it will prove to be so only when true Islamic prerequisites are kept in mind.

Gerard of Cremona

Gerard, who was born in Cremona, Lombardy, in 1114, was a medieval scholar who translated the works of many major Greek and Arabic writers into Latin, there being a great body of scientific and philosophical literature in these languages which were well worth making available to all the known world at that time. In this sense, he performed the same service for his countrymen that Hunain Ibn Ishaq had done for eastern Arabia. He went specially to Toledo, in Spain, to learn Arabic so that he could read the *Almagest* by Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer, geographer and mathematician who lived in the second century A.D. The *Almagest* was a vast computation of the astronomical knowledge of the ancients, and was accepted as authoritative up to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As such, this was one of Gerard's most significant translations. He was assisted in his task by two other scholars, one Christian and one Jewish. With this, and other such books, the gates of Greek and Arabic sciences were opened for the first time to the west. In the field of medicine, he translated books by Buqrat and Galen, almost all of the books by Hunain and Al-Kindi, Abul Qasim Zuhra's book on surgery and many other books on the physical sciences, including the pamphlet on fossils which is attributed to Aristotle. Besides these, he rendered into Latin Avicenna's massive volume on law and many other books by Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ishaq and Sabit, etc.

Many other purveyors of knowledge were later to follow in Gerard's footsteps. In the words of Dr Maz Mirhaf, 'He was the founder of Arabism in the western world.'

In 1187, in Toledo, Gerard fell ill, and felt himself that his end was near. He wondered to himself what would happen when he was gone. "These books in Arabic are so precious," he thought, "and who is going to translate them into western languages?" His reflections moved him profoundly and he was fired with new zeal and energy. In spite of his rapidly failing health, he then succeeded in translating the remainder of his valuable collection of books. Legend has it that in the space of one month before his death, he had completed the translations of no less than 80 books.

When one feels sufficiently inspired to perform a task, one undertakes it at all costs, even on one's death bed, and even when one's external circumstances are totally adverse. It is one's will and one's motivation to work which are of prime importance. Health and strength are secondary.

Reading the Signs

With the increase of traffic in modern times, the danger of accidents has also increased. To obviate this danger, various forms of road signs have been erected for the guidance of motorists. One such sign reads: "Lane driving is safe driving." Keeping to one's lane is an effective safeguard against accidents, averting the danger of colliding with other motor-cars, and ensuring that one's journey does not end in disaster.

An article in a British motoring magazine by an expert on driving gives some indispensable rules of thumb for drivers. If one is speeding down a main road, for example, and suddenly a ball appears from a side road, one must realize that there is probably a child not far behind it. If one sees the ball, but fails to see the child, one cannot count oneself a good driver. The really good driver stops, not on account of the ball, but on account of the child that he sees with his mind's eye running behind the ball. It is the quickness of his imagination which saves the child from being run over.

The principles we are required to keep in mind while driving are the same as those we should keep in mind on our journey through life. If one wishes, one can learn from the "highway code" the principle that one should follow in the vaster arena of life.

Always confine your activities to your own sphere; if you infringe on the sphere of others, you are sure to clash with them: your progress will come to an abrupt halt. When certain signs appear on the horizon of society, try to make out what these signs imply. Do not just go by outward signs; try to reach the meaning behind them. If one just goes by what one sees and fails to see what lurks in the background, one will not advance in one's journey through life. Others, more far-seeing than oneself, will forge ahead, while one falls victim to dangers that could have been avoided, if one had read the signs properly (116:4)

Trust is Golden

With just a few hundred rupees capital, a man from Delhi started a business. He used to buy scraps of cloth which he would sell from door to door. When his business had grown somewhat, he obtained permission to sit on the pavement in front of a shop and sell his merchandise there.

This freelance cloth-merchant built up a good deal of trust with his wholesaler, whom he impressed with his honesty and fair dealing. The wholesaler began to grant cloth on loan to the vendor, who always made an effort to settle his debt before the appointed date. This habit made him even more trustworthy in the eyes of the wholesaler, who granted him more and more cloth on loan. After just a few years, the wholesaler was giving this street-vendor Rs. 150,000 worth of cloth on loan, an amount which he would not have given anybody else except on the basis of a considerable cash down-payment.

Clearly, such a large amount of cloth could not be accommodated on the street. The cloth-vendor now required a shop. He bought one, and continued to spiral, and before long he was among the leading cloth-merchants of the old city.

It is a mistake to think of money as the greatest asset in life. The greatest asset is trust. On the basis of trust one can buy anything. What one lacks in other departments he can make up for in trust. Trust is an invaluable asset which can buy even more than money.

But the way to establish trust is not by repeating how trustworthy one is. No, it is by acting in a trustworthy manner. The outside world is very severe in this regard. Unless one proves, one's trustworthiness by impeccable actions, one cannot expect to receive the benefit of the doubt. Only if one consistently shows oneself worthy of trust over a long period, as the cloth vendor showed himself in his dealings with the wholesale merchant, will one be accorded trust in this world (117:7).

The Secret of Success

Eighty per cent of the information received by a human being from the outside world comes to him through his eyes – provided he keeps his eyes open. There is an abundance of oxygen in the air, but if it is to do him any good, he must assiduously breathe it in. If, however, we are to benefit from our environment, it means rather more than just depending upon our own spontaneous biological functioning. It means that we must have the will and ability to seize the opportunities given to us by God and to learn to grapple with whatever their built-in conditions may be. We cannot expect the world – of its own – to lay its gifts at our feet.

This concept is of the greatest importance in the sphere of *Dawah* work. The spreading of the Islamic message is not something which is going to happen automatically, and, if it is to come about, it will depend upon our grasping whatever opportunities come our way. In modern times the greatest opportunity that has presented itself is the widespread freedom of belief enjoyed all over the world. (Only in a few communist countries are curbs placed upon religious activities). This freedom, however, carries with it a tacit proviso, i.e. that propagation of the faith must not take place by coercion, but by gentle persuasion. One reason for this is that so long as one does not use force, there will be no serious opposition to such activity. Perhaps a more important reason is that everyone should enjoy the same freedom of belief; the forcing of beliefs upon others is tantamount to encroaching upon that freedom, nay, destroying it. Failure to respect this condition means misusing the opportunity which presents itself; *Dawah* activity carried on in this way would eventually prove counter-productive. After such an abuse of another's privilege, there would be nothing to stand between us and God's punishment, for it is He who has provided us with this unique opportunity to bring other people within the fold. It is an opportunity to be seized, not wasted.

Missed opportunities spell ruin. That is the way of the world. And that is the will of God. (114:10-11)

At the Olympic Games held in Los Angeles in September-October 1984, about 62 Indian sportsmen participated. When the games were over and they returned to New Delhi on August 16, 1984, they received a chilly welcome, as they had failed to win a single medal, neither gold, silver nor bronze.

What was the reason for this failure? According to a report published in the *Times of India* (August 17, 1984), "Lack of scientific and systematic training was the main reason for India's poor showing. We did our best but that, unfortunately, was not good enough. The entrants began their training just three months beforehand."

What has been said about the Olympic Games applies to all walks of life.

In this world of competition it is necessary to enter the field fully prepared. If you enter it inadequately prepared, little else but failure will await you.

Your preparation should conform to two requirements: it should be organized and it should be consistent with the standards of the times. If it is not so, you will fail to make your mark and you will be unable to keep in step with modern developments.

Teacher Tree

The tree-trunk forms one half of a tree and the roots the other half. Botanists tell us that there is just as much of a tree spread under the ground as there is standing above the ground. The top half of a tree can only stand erect and verdant above the ground when it is prepared to bury its other half beneath the ground. This is an example which trees show to mankind; a philosopher puts it this way:

“Root downward, fruit upward, that is the divine protocol.”

The rose comes to a perfect combination of colour, line and aroma atop a tall stem. Its perfection is achieved, however, because first a root went down into the homely matrix of the common earth. Those who till the soil or garden understand the analogy. Our interests have so centred on gathering the fruit that it has been easy to forget the cultivation of the root.

A tree stands above the ground, fixing its roots firmly beneath the ground. It grows from beneath, upwards into the air; it does not start at the top and grow downwards. The tree is our teacher, imparting to us the lesson of nature that if we seek to progress outwardly, we must first strengthen ourselves inwardly; we must begin from the base of our own selves before we can hope to build society anew